



**Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of Texas**

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**RIO GRAND CITY POLICE OFFICERS CONVICTED OF ACCEPTING BRIBES**

McALLEN, TX – United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle today announced the conviction of three former Rio Grande City police officers for accepting bribes. At a hearing held on Thursday, March 30, 2006, before United States District Judge Ricardo Hinojosa, Victor Benitez, 33, of Eagle Pass, TX, Eddie Alvarez, 30, of Sullivan City, TX, and Melissa Martinez, 30, of Roma, TX, each pleaded guilty to using their official positions as officers of the Rio Grande City Police Department to protect vehicles loaded with narcotics in exchange for money in violation of the Hobbs Act, 18 U.S.C. 1951. All three former officers face a maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine at sentencing. The court has permitted the defendants to remain free on bond pending their sentencing hearing scheduled for June 27, 2006, at 9:30 a.m.

At yesterday's late afternoon re-arraignment hearing, Benitez admitted that on October 23, 2003, while serving as a Rio Grande City Police Officer, he arranged for his colleague and co-defendant, Eddie Alvarez, to escort a vehicle they believed to contain four kilogram of cocaine through their jurisdiction to avoid detection by other law enforcement. The load vehicle was actually driven by an individual working with the FBI. Alvarez admitted using his police patrol vehicle to escort the load vehicle through his jurisdiction to avoid detection by other law enforcement. On October 27, 2003, Benitez and Alvarez each accepted \$1,000 as payment for arranging and performing the unlawful escort.

Martinez admitted that on May 4, 2004, she used her Rio Grande City police patrol vehicle to escort a vehicle she believe to contain four kilograms of cocaine through her jurisdiction to avoid detection by other law enforcement and to accepting a \$1500 bribe as payment nine days later on May 13, 2004. The load vehicle was actually driven by an individual working for the FBI.

"We, as citizens, place justified faith and trust in our police officers," said United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle. "When an officer sells his or her badge to protect criminal activity, as they did in this case, he or she betrays that faith and trust and should expect to bear the full weight of federal law. "

The indictment of these three former police officers is the result of a long term and continuing investigation conducted by the McAllen office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Jim McAlister is prosecuting the case.

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